

Leadership As A Social Phenomenon

Anita Mountain

Anita Mountain, Teaching and Supervising Transactional Analyst (with Organisational & Psychotherapy specialties), Anita travels nationally and internationally offering consultancy, coaching, training for both the not-for-profit and commercial sectors.

Anita also runs an open-workshop program on Organisational TA. Along with Chris Davidson she co-authored Working Together, Organizational Transactional Analysis and Business Performance, the new edition of which is now out in paperback (see the Gower/Ashgate website).



Introduction

When we consider the interactive processes of leadership, we also need to take into account the social aspects.

Transactional Analysis (TA) is well placed to consider both social and personal psychology. 'Social' in this context means what happens when people come together. Berne developed linear ways to track interactions between people but also gave consideration to groups and the boundaries between different parts of the structure. However, the latter has taken a more minor role in TA as the focus has tended to be on individual 'autonomy'. Berne's work in relation to groups was, and still is, seminal and an effective way to think through interventions and this paper will relate Berne's thinking with that of Social Emotional Intelligence (author's term) and its importance for leadership within the organizational system.

Leadership

When it comes to definitions of leadership many consider the effect of the leader on others, rather than how a leader can influence the social aspects of the whole organization. Here's an example from Krausz:

In this discussion power will be defined as the ability to influence the actions of others, individuals or groups. It is understood as the "leader's influence potential" (Hersey, et al., 1979), a resource that enables a leader to obtain certain outcomes when interacting with individuals or groups.

(Krausz R. 1986; p. 85)

Whilst this quote relates to power and leadership it is significant because the emphasis is on the

leader's influence rather than the social and co-creative processes that go on in organizations.

Talking about Berne, Campos (2012) states:

His strong interest in the family scripting process may have led him later to state flatly, "Culture has very little to do with scripts" (Berne, 1972, p. 323). My premise that "the power is in community" means that individuals also gain strength at a collective level from positive connections with others. This is in line with other more socially oriented transactional analysts.

(Campos, 2012, p.209)

Berne's statement is at odds with his own experience growing up as he did in a disadvantaged area and eventually changing his name when he moved to the States. However, Campos' point is that Transactional Analysts are socially orientated, and for me this is never more so than when working in organizations. Any organization has an impact on its environment including the local population, which all need to be taken into account when considering leadership as a social phenomenon.

I was stimulated to consider leadership in this way through reading Gantt and Agazarian, (2004, p149) on Emotional Intelligence who state:

Our focus here is to introduce the idea of emotional intelligence as a systems phenomenon that is relevant at all system levels, whether it be the organizational level, the work group level, the role level, or even the level of the individual. We are proposing that orienting to emotional intelligence at an organizational level and with work teams requires an alternative model from the current

conceptualizations which leave the focus on individual resources at the expense of the system context. Thus, this paper presents a systems-centered paradigm for conceptualizing emotional intelligence and discusses how this applies at the work group and organizational levels.

Whilst this paper relates to systems emotional intelligence it is also pertinent for leadership as a social phenomenon.

The context and the contract

Given the increased organizational complexities it is insufficient to focus on leader attributes and leader-follower relationships. There needs to be increased co-creativity between leaders for the benefit of the organization. Leaders need to take into account the current context, a part of which is the need for increased collaboration at all levels. There are leaders at all levels of the organization and these need to be acknowledged. They may, or may not have a hierarchic role but they are influencers and can be more so once the system, structure and culture is accepting and encouraging.

One of the leaders I coach in the UK was aware that it has taken him 18 months to action an idea which would save people time. He had previously emailed a group of managers who all agreed that his idea would save time and frustration. However, nothing happened about it until, 18 months later, he took up a new role on a committee where he was able to talk with the Chair about the same idea, which was then actioned.

From this experience and his frustration, he realised that other staff must have good ideas and have difficulty in bring them to fruition. As a new leader he realised that the organization needed to ask them. In this way they would feel accounted and morale would increase.

The coaching focussed on systems and structures to enable these ideas to get put into practice. After exploring the discounting process he realised that his idea was not originally actioned because there was no one responsible for undertaking it. Whilst

those doing the job often know best a system and structure was required in order fulfil those ideas.

So here was a new leader who, based on his own experience, was prepared to look at ways staff could be influential in the organization. This was likely to improve morale and therefore productivity and hopefully develop greater collaboration between hierarchic roles. In addition to structures and systems there would also need to be an attitude change because seeking out and encouraging ideas has not been the norm in the organization and might first require willingness from all levels of the hierarchy. Simple ideas may take more complex solutions but ones which, with commitment, are worth making for the benefit of the individual, teams, organization and of course the customer or end user.

Postheroic leadership re-envision the 'who' and 'where' of leadership by focusing on the need to distribute the tasks and responsibilities of leadership up, down, and across the hierarchy. It re-envision the 'what' of leadership by articulating leadership as a social process that occurs in and through human interactions, and it articulates the 'how' of leadership by focusing on the more mutual, less hierarchical leadership practices and skills needed to engage collaborative, collective learning. It is generally recognized that this shift – from individual to collective, from control to learning, from 'self' to 'self-in-relation', and from power over to power with – is a paradigm shift in what it means to be a positional leader.

(Fletcher 2004, p. 650)

Concepts of Leadership

In the early days it was considered good leadership if the leader was authoritarian and maintained a clear boundary between the leadership region and the workforce. As time went on we moved to a position where it was all about relying on appointing the best leader an organization could find and then developing their competencies. This more individualistic approach had the leader as the key person to move the organization toward it's goals. These concepts of leadership still continue and need changing for both those in leadership

positions and those within the workforce. This is likely to require an organizational cultural and attitudinal shift.

Today's leaders need to be willing to distribute leadership throughout the organization which will lead to greater productivity and increased morale. This is therefore more about *leaderships* than leadership.

The emphasis would be on learning and development but leaders may need support to make these changes as they will affect how hierarchic power is used. There are likely to be feelings of anxiety, frustration and reluctance and coaching interventions may be helpful to ensure leaders are emotionally intelligent in the new context.

Any desired changes need to be made at a rate that the organization can cope with. Without this

progress can be sabotaged as people feel wary of taking on new ideas and working in new ways. Whilst individually based the Competence Curve is useful to keep in mind.

When making changes each organization needs to consider what needs to happen at what stage. Changing to a social leadership frame of reference is likely to bring a variety of responses:

- Am I good enough?
- How do I hold on to my power?
- Will I still be respected?
- How do I collaborate if we are in a competitive culture?
- How can I be a leader when we are encouraging everyone to lead?
- How is this good for the business and how do I 'sell' it?

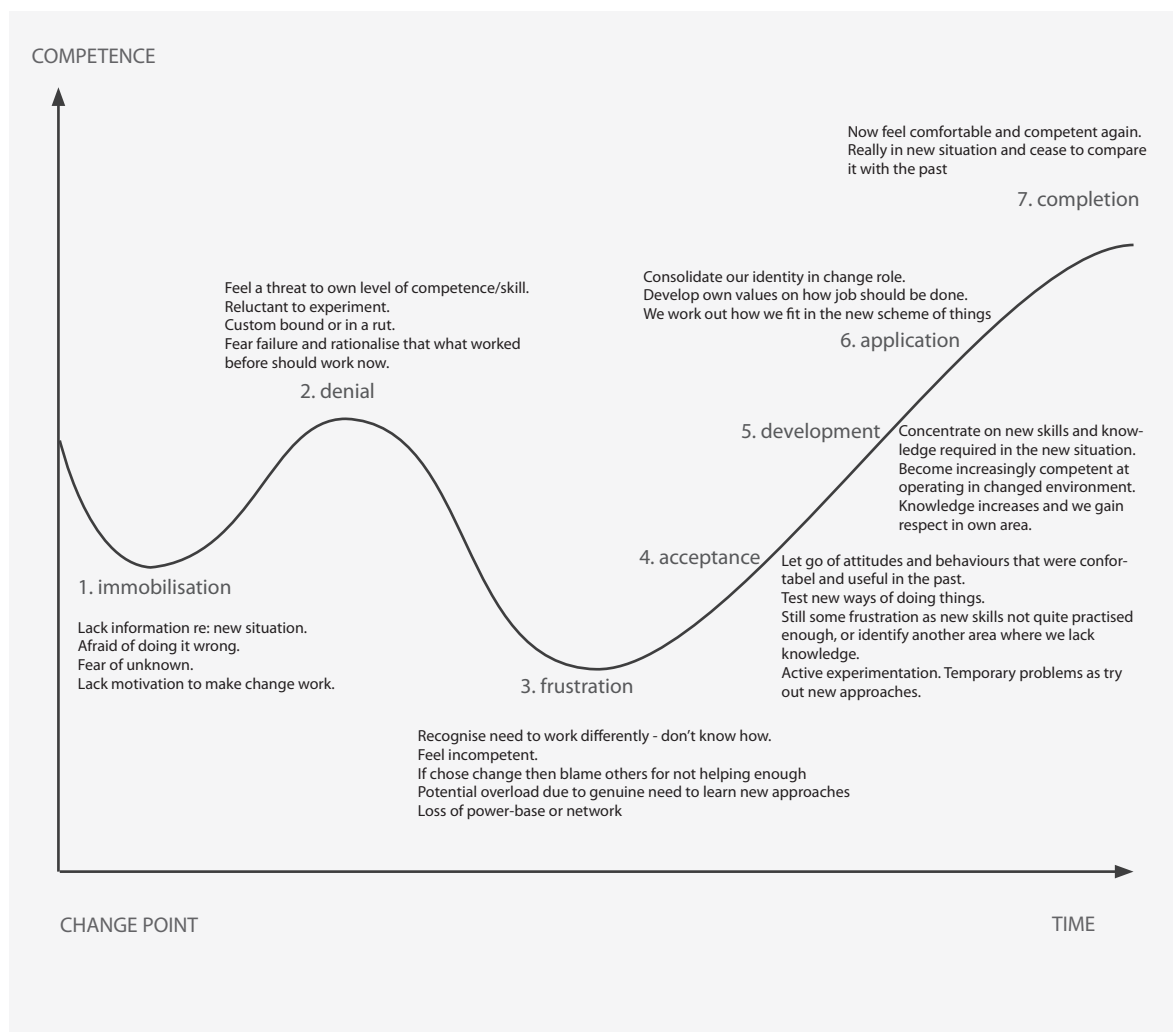


Figure 1: Competence Curve – Hay J (1992, pp168-171) amended and reproduced with permission.

In addition the organizational structure will need to be considered. If boundaries are too rigid between the hierarchic roles then it will be difficult to develop a culture of distributed leadership. Rigid boundaries mean that any emotional responses are likely to be defended against by the department or organization. If not addressed, leaders are likely to sabotage the new developments.

Berne's structural diagrams are useful when considering boundaries. I will take the following two diagrams as examples



Figure 2: Complex Structural Diagram

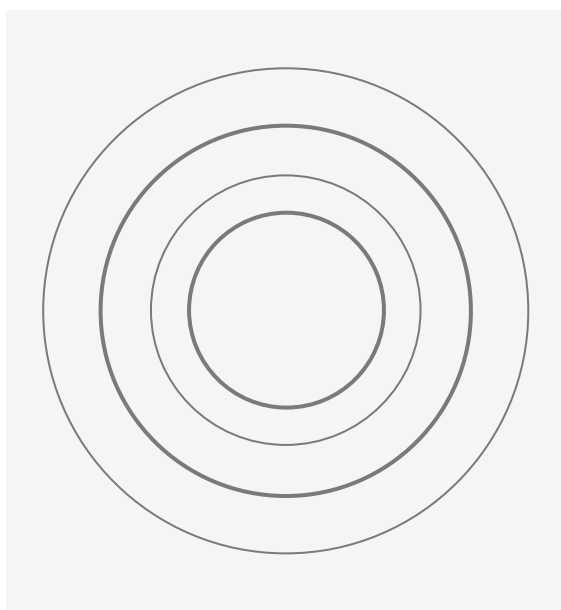


Figure 3: Compound Structural Diagram

The Complex Structural Diagram above shows an organization with two partners and various organizational departments. In many of today's organizations we are likely to need to multiply both the leadership and department regions, however the diagram is still useful to show the potential difficulties. The thicker black line denotes a more rigid boundary. If the leadership region boundary is too rigid then ideas from the workforce are unlikely to get through. Any leaders within those departments might feel disenfranchised from the decision-making processes.

In Berne's Compound Structural Diagram there are rigid boundaries between the outer level and the next region and again between the central leadership region and the next region or level to it. This can create defensive situations with those furthest from the centre feeling alienated from leadership.

Neither of these situations would provide a healthy environment in which to develop social leadership. Preparatory work would be required, including exploration of any assumptions, frames of reference about leadership, productivity and outcomes.

It would also be important to take account of Berne's three types of leader: Responsible, Effective and Psychological. The Responsible leader is the one in the hierarchic position and where the "buck stops". The Effective leader is the one who gets the job done whilst the Psychological leader can benefit or harm the team or organization. Psychological leaders are the ones who set the tone, attitude and value system and are part of the private structure of the team. These leadership types can reside in different people or the same person. This concept is in keeping with distributed leadership and an organization would need to be overt in its considerations of these aspects in order to effectively use the potential physis available.

As previously mentioned changes need to be made at the rate that organization can assimilate them. Too fast and there may be sabotage. It is important that this move to a culture of distributed leadership is not experienced as an absence of leadership, which could lead to unhealthy

competition for the leadership slot due underlying fears about safety. Leaders need to hold the safety for the team/department and work with those positive Psychological leaders to encourage alignment of principles and values to enable and promote the necessary changes.

Patterns of behaviour

Through the use of Transactional Analysis, organizations are more able to see and understand patterns of behaviour that lead to energy being used on conflict rather than on productivity. Encouraging exploration of perspectives through contextualising and accounting will lead to physis, a change in the stroking patterns and a move out of the organizational script.

Using Dissent

If we are taking a systems and social perspective on leadership then it is necessary to understand a range of views.

Different contexts have different goals and contribute different perspectives. How a department views a reorganisation is different than the work team's perspective and different again, from the perspective of the organization as a whole. Being able to change perspectives is critically important in today's workplace where rapid changes require employees to change roles and contexts frequently. Further being able to recognise the impact of the context and the concomitant goals of the context increases the likelihood of successful communication across subsystems.

(Gantt and Agazarian, 2004, p152)

Gantt and Agazarian then go on to describe a process of exploration by taking at least three different perspectives which change as the context changes. Teams are invited to explore an issue from their own, from the departmental and then from the individual branch perspective. This shifts the process from one of being team-centred to being systems centred. There are likely to be a number of benefits of exploring different contexts namely:

- greater objectivity with the move from individualising to contextualizing.

- co-creative processes
- increased understanding therefore greater empathy
- solutions that account the different perspectives are more likely to meet the desired outcomes

There are also different perspectives within teams and when these are explored people feel heard and are less likely to develop resentment and play games. This also means that energy is expended on the final outcomes and productivity rather than on conflict.

Organizational Roles

Another way to consider how the progress to social leadership could be sabotaged is by using Schmid's (2008) seminal article on role concept. This is of particular use when coaching MD, board members etc. If there is resistance to change then exploration of perspectives from different roles might be useful i.e. the private, professional and organizational. Without doing so there may be an undiscovered impasse between the roles that could potentially sabotage the move to social leadership.

In Conclusion

The aim of considering leadership as a social phenomenon is to move the organization on from one of leader/follower to one of recognition of the whole system. This requires mindfulness i.e. taking into account the self; the context including the market economy, environmental issues and involvement and collaboration between the all levels of the workforce.

Mindfulness is at the heart of the OK Modes Model (Mountain A. & Davidson C., 2011), see figure 4 below. (There is not the space here for a full explanation of this model but you can find this in the reference provided. As with the OK Corral, we colour this model red and green. Green is for effective and red is for ineffective communication. In this paper red is in italics and grey, whilst black in regular font is in place of that we usually colour green). When we are not taking account of all of the areas listed above then we are likely to be in script and will move into one of

the red zones. The three squares on the outer edge of the circle represent the Not OK position on the OK Coral. This model replaces the Functional Ego States model which is not congruent with the concept of Structural Integrating Adult ego state. At the organizational level social leadership is about developing a Mindful culture so that the structures, policies, training etc. are congruent. This then creates a winning culture where everyone remains potent through listening, understanding, and taking responsibility.

Remaining in the green Mindful process will mean we are in the flow and cognisant of as many issues and areas as possible. This will help to move the organizational culture to a Mindful one

When all aspects of the organization and different perspectives are taken into consideration people feel valued and involved. Subsequently morale is likely to improve, followed by increased collaboration which in turn enhances productivity. Developing a culture where everyone can become winners is an important part of the process.

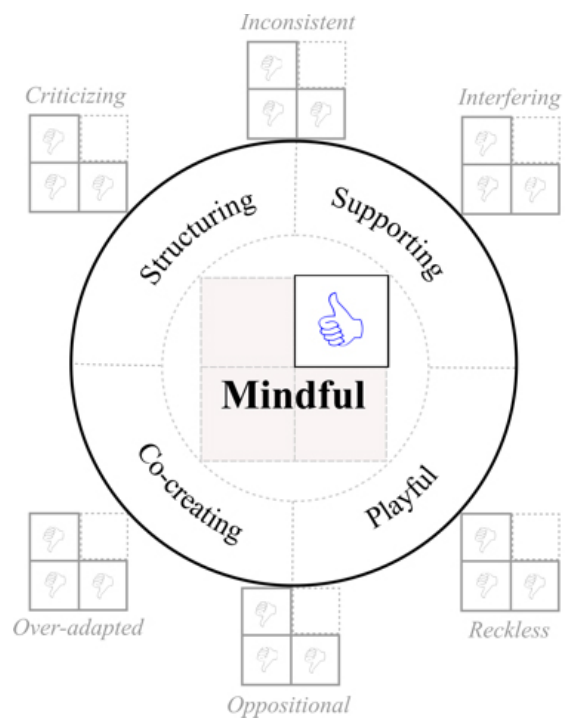


Figure 4: OK Modes Model (Mountain & Davidson, 2011)

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